

Jewel Jones, MOA Director of Health and Human Services addressed the group outlining initiatives in place with faith based groups in Anchorage. She began her presentation by reminding them that the first head start programs in Anchorage begun as part of President Johnson's War on Poverty, was operated by the Archdiocese of Anchorage at the old Catholic High School, now North Star Elementary School on Fireweed Lane. Sister Mary Clare was the administrator and this federal funding when directly to them from the Community Action Agency. Another early initiatives was the Brother Francis Shelter, operated by Catholic Social Services, the only homeless shelter for single men and women in Anchorage - soon to be replaced after 20 years.

Additionally, in the early 90's, the first transitional housing programs under the HUD "dollar per year" lease were operated by the Municipality in partnership with Prevailing Word Outreach Church under the leadership of Rev. Bernard Smalls. Two members of his congregation, Ron and Annie Phelps, were selected as house monitors and lived on site in one of the apartments which were side-by-side four-plex units in Mt. View. Another four-plex also located in Mt. View was part of the program and over a five year period, successfully assisted 132 clients to find a more stable life and move on to their own permanent housing.

The most promising of our government and faith initiatives is the successful Anchorage Caring and Emergency Social Services program known as ACCESS formed in 1997 as a partnership between the MOA, United Way, and several churches to assist people in need. Through memorandums of agreement, we have developed policies, procedures, intake assessment tools and application forms that help all the participating groups work in coordination. We have over 70 ministries actively involved in the program that recognize government, agencies and faith can work together using the strengths of each segment to support the other. Churches like Abbott Loop Community Church, First CME Church and Eagle River Missionary Baptist Church support the effort thru regular monetary contributions that are accessed by the MOA to help pay utilities, rent, purchase food, or other necessities to keep people from becoming homeless. This organization holds the greatest promise to continue the work of faith groups and government working together for the community.

During the month of February, the MOA Dept. of Health and Human Services sponsored a "Pastoral Crisis Intervention" training program conducted by Chaplin Bert McQueen to assist ministers and other lay groups in acquiring more tools to assist with mental health counseling as we face more stressful issues and concerns in our community and nation. Many people turn to their churches and ministers in these times and it is our desire to give them additional counseling skills as more people seek comfort.

These are just a few of the many ongoing opportunities and collaborations between the MOA and others that help us everyday to a better job for our citizens.